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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Effective mobilization and integration of women in development

Note by the Secretary General

1. In its resolution 46/167 of 19 December 1991 on women, environment, population and sustainable development, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to include in the report on effective mobilization and integration of women in development, to be submitted to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session, a section on the role of women in environment and sustainable development.

2. In view of the complexity of the issue and the many different aspects to be covered by the report, extra time has had to be allowed for its preparation in order to take into account relevant input from the first session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, to be held from 14 to 25 June, the recommendations from the preparatory process for the International Conference on Population and Development, and the results from the World Conference on Human Rights, to be held in Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993. For this reason, it is not possible to present the report to the Economic and Social Council, but instead it will be submitted to the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly. The present note provides an outline of the report to be submitted.

3. The report will outline its mandates and objectives, as well as key concepts such as sustainable development, gender, gender perspective and gender analysis. The main objective of the report will be to illustrate why and how gender analysis should be incorporated in the implementation and monitoring of Agenda 21. 1/

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* E/1993/100.

4. The second section will analyse the role of women as it appears in Agenda 21 and its implications for sustainable development. The report will focus on such aspects as (a) how the relation between women and the environment is perceived in Agenda 21, (b) the places where women are mentioned, whether in relation to global or specific problems, developed or developing countries, rural or urban areas, and (c) whether women are "mainstreamed" in the document or seen as a specific group, and whether they are perceived as active or passive. Among the conclusions considered likely to be made in this section will be that Agenda 21 should be seen as a starting-point and a recognition of the importance of linking the achievement of sustainable development to the participation of women, but that Agenda 21 in its present form may not express this with sufficient clarity since the link between the role of women and sustainable development has been defined in Agenda 21 without challenging the established unequal gender structure. The question will be asked, for this reason, whether goals and guidelines, as outlined in Agenda 21, are likely to be achieved.

5. It will also be concluded that gender relations determine the status of women and their relation to environment, resources, reproductive life and family, and that sustainable development cannot be achieved unless the status of women is raised and gender relations taken into account. Women are related to environment in a specific way, because of their reproductive and community managing roles.

6. The third section will provide three concrete examples in order to illustrate the relation between gender and sustainable development and the way in which gender analysis can be applied to identify obstacles to sustainable development and strategies to achieve it.

7. The first example will be that of poverty and gender, which will illustrate the links between the lower status of women, the feminization of poverty, and the environment, through an examination of the roles of women as managers/users of resources and as producers in the subsistence sector. Two interacting key interventions will be discussed: how measures taken to increase the status of women could reduce poverty and environmental degradation; and how measures to reduce environmental degradation could contribute to lowering levels of poverty.

8. The second example will be urbanization and gender and will illustrate how women in urban areas, in their efforts to manage their families and their neighbourhoods and surrounding environment, struggle to compensate for the lack of social services. Such efforts form part of women's reproductive role, which is a gender role assigned to them by society. However, their reproductive work fails to be recognized as work per se, as opposed to men's productive work, although women make up the support structure which enables men to look for paid jobs. In combination with women's lack of education as a direct result of their lower status, reproductive work effectively reduces women's ability to take advantage of economic opportunities. The double burden of women (reproductive work frequently combined with badly paid, labour-intensive, productive work) locks women into dependent positions and prevents them from fully participating in the development process. At the same time, urban governments frequently make it difficult for poor women in urban areas to improve their living situation and the environment by, for example, failing to assist in improving housing or facilitating access to clean water and by illegalizing the collection of wood

for fuel. So far, the activity of sustaining life, mostly carried out by women, has been accorded low social and economic importance in the development of urban areas.

9. In the last example, the issue of gender and family planning programmes will be illustrated. It will be argued that family planning programmes have had a tendency to operate in a "gender vacuum", that is, they have been focused only on women and their fertility, thus ignoring the links to men, gender roles and society as a whole. Contraceptives have been developed mainly for women and have sometimes given without proper information about their proper use and the range of available prevention methods. It will be argued that, in order for family planning programmes to be effective and compatible with human rights and women's and men's self-dignity, family planning programmes should be directed both to men and to women and carried out jointly with measures to raise the status of women and policies for distribution of resources. These programmes should be directed to men and to women, and they should be based on an analysis of the existing gender system in order to identify the appropriate measures that need to be taken to make this system more equitable, thereby empowering women and men to gain control over their fertility and share the responsibility for the upbringing of children.

10. In a final section, conclusions will be drawn from those discussions and analyses. The chapter will be entitled "Measures to include a gender approach in Agenda 21". The discussion and the identification of measures in this chapter will to a great extent draw upon draft resolution IV on women, environment and development from the report of the thirty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women (see E/1993/27, sect. I), which will be considered by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1993.

11. Finally, the report will make concrete recommendations on means of integrating a gender approach in the development of policies, programmes and the monitoring of Agenda 21, and suggestions on factors that can be taken into account in the review of Agenda 21, which is to be carried out by the Assembly in 1997.

Notes

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8), resolution 1, annex II.